



# First looks

Every month we bring you sneak previews of the latest kit from [www.computershopper.co.uk](http://www.computershopper.co.uk)

## Canon HF10

The HF10 is Canon's first flash memory HD camcorder. Its compact design puts it directly in competition with Panasonic's excellent HDC-SD9. The HF10 has 16GB of built-in memory, which will store around three hours of video at the highest quality setting. There's also an SDHC memory card slot, so you can add more storage if required. Recordings are made in AVCHD format with a maximum resolution of 1,920x1,080 at 25fps in progressive mode (1080p). The HF10 has a maximum bit rate of 17Mbit/s.

We were present at its launch, and got to shoot around three hours of video with one. It coped well in a wide range of lighting conditions and was very capable when it came to quickly switching focus and exposure levels. Colours looked bright and vibrant, and there was plenty of detail, too. The HF10 is a little larger and heavier than the HDC-SD9, but has some useful extras such as a microphone input and accessory shoe, so it will appeal to enthusiasts. The 12x optical zoom is huge for such a small device, which measures only 64x73x129mm, and optical image stabilization is built in.

The 211,000-pixel LCD provides plenty of detail for shot composition, and it displays colours accurately. Manual controls such as focus and



exposure are controlled by the joystick beside the display. However, this isn't an ideal camcorder for those interested in tweaking their shots, as there's no dedicated focus control, or focus-assist zoom button.

The HF10 should be available to buy imminently, and will cost around £650 including VAT. We'll bring you a full review next month.

## Olympus E-420

Olympus is poised to release the world's smallest digital SLR, the E-420. This camera weighs just 380g. It's an update to the company's already-tiny E-410 and has much in common, including the same 14-42mm kit lens and 10-megapixel sensor.

The E-420 has an improved live-view mode, where you can use the 2.7in screen to line up and take shots just as on a compact camera. It's the first DSLR we've seen with a live-view autofocus. Pressing the shutter button halfway focuses the camera and displays the results on the screen. On the E-410, only pressing the shutter button all the way in triggers the focus. This makes it easier to take shots where using the viewfinder is tricky, and we were impressed with the results.

Picture quality is very similar to the E-410's. ISO modes from 100 to 1600 are available, with 1600



being usable where needs must, but it isn't up to the standard we'd expect from Canon's cameras. Higher ISO modes reduced detail and made pictures look a little soft.

There's still no SD card slot, although you do have a choice between xD and CompactFlash slots.

There's still no sensor-based image stabilisation, but there is a dust-removal feature that vibrates the sensor when the camera's turned on. This adds a couple of seconds to the power-up time.

The camera's controls remain much the same, with a combination of the onscreen menu and cursor keys giving you quick access to common settings, including ISO speed, face detection and white balance.

The E-420 will cost around £379 including VAT when it launches in May.

## Sony Vaio VGX-TP2S/B

The compact Vaio VGX-TP2S/B makes a welcome change from all the boxy Media Center PCs. It uses a circular case, similar in size to a hat box. The HDMI port and GeForce 8400 GT graphics card make it well equipped for playing Blu-ray movies. However, despite the £900 price, it can't burn data to blank Blu-ray discs. The optical S/PDIF output allows you to connect a surround-sound amplifier, so your HD movies can sound as good as they look.

You can record TV shows thanks to the integrated hybrid TV tuner. There's no second tuner, though, so you can't record one programme while watching another. The 500GB hard disk should provide plenty of room for days' worth of shows.

The keyboard feels comfortable to type on, as it uses the same responsive keys found on many of Sony's Vaio laptops. The keyboard's built-in touch pad felt a bit jittery, but fiddling with the settings made it more bearable. Although the 256MB GeForce 8400 GT graphics processor can play 3D games, you'll have to settle for less-detailed graphics and lower screen resolutions to get smooth frame rates.

Initial impressions of the Vaio VGX-TP2S/B are mainly good, but we'll bring you a full review when a final production model arrives in our labs. **CS**

